

A CHILD-RIGHTS APPROACH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

In many cases, one parent - often the father or husband - migrates leaving the family behind. While a parent working abroad may send remittances which provide significant benefit to the family at home, there are documented correlations between poverty and female-headed households.³ Care by the extended family, or community or institutional care, also ensures less protection from abuse and exploitation than does parental care. Families under stress may tend to transfer adult burdens to their oldest children—especially to girls. Adolescent girls may be required to leave school or work for wages, sometimes in unsafe ways and away from their homes. In addition, fragmented and marginalized groups, such as migrant labourers and their families, are at the heart of the AIDS pandemic.⁴

2. Child migrants

Children are often trafficked for domestic labour or to work in service industries, construction, agriculture, fishing and begging. Various patterns of trafficking have been documented in different parts of the world. Trafficking for purposes of child labour is largely demand-driven, and is part of a large unmet demand for labour that is cheap and malleable. Child labour is attractive not because it is cheap, but rather because children are easier to abuse, less assertive and less able to claim their rights than adults; they can be made to work longer hours with less food, poor accommodation and no benefits. Victims of trafficking for child labour often work in conditions hazardous to their physical and mental health.

The criminalization of victims of trafficking is also of concern. Rather than receiving assistance and protection, people who have been trafficked may be prosecuted or imprisoned. They may be subjected to humiliating and intimidating treatment at the hands of police, border control and other law enforcement agents. This can occur in both the sending and receiving countries. Children and women who have been in the sex industry and are repatriated are especially vulnerable to further abuse on their return. Returnees may also face serious difficulties reintegrating in their community or family if they are regarded as dishonoured or as failing to reap the benefits of their travel.

In conflict and post-conflict situations, lawlessness, family separation, displacement, subsistence needs and other factors lead to high child vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, including trafficking. Families may also believe that children sent away from the conflict zones have the prospect of a better life. Family tracing efforts are part of many post conflict programmes, and the importance of thorough tracing is reflected in the Declaration to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.¹⁰ Sexual exploitation and trafficking are also linked to demand, by relatively wealthy actors (national or international) during or after conflict.

B. BUILDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

UNICEF's actions to increase the protection of children are based on the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention, ratified by all but two countries, establishes the right of every child to a name and nationality, the highest attainable standard of health and education, and to protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, among other things. These rights apply to all children, regardless of residency status.

UNICEF aims to build a protective environment for children, focussing on systemic factors at all levels—from government to community to family—that should protect children but do not always do so. In its efforts to strengthen protection at several levels, UNICEF seeks both the prevention of abuse and adequate responses where abuse has occurred. These efforts will normally include some or all of the following: strengthened government commitment to child protection; improved legislation and its implementation; a change in customs or practices that do not adequately protect children; more open discussion of the issue; strengthening the capacity of children and adolescents for their own protection, through greater awareness and participation; strengthening the capacity of those closest to the child; improved services; and adequate monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The examples below illustrate these elements in the context of child trafficking. Strong government

personnel, promote reception facilities, and help create a commission at the ministerial level on repatriation and reintegration issues.

As far as customs and practices are concerned, beliefs about the role of girls, particularly with regard to education, can lead families to put girls at risk. In Turkey, UNICEF will assist migrant families with birth registration particularly for girls and will offer financial assistance for schooling (books, uniforms, compensation for loss of income from child labour), health care and legal protection.

Media attention can be an important element in the fight against trafficking, by raising awareness as well as opening up formerly taboo issues for discussion. Many families and children are dependent on the media to inform and educate them about the dangers of trafficking. In El Salvador, UNICEF works with partners on a radio campaign to raise awareness among parents about the risks of hiring smugglers to take their children illegally to the US, involving young people who have been deported.

Children need to be aware of the dangers of trafficking so that they can protect themselves. Ideally, they should be and remain in school; UNICEF recognises that early interventions are the most effective, and works closely with Ministries of Education to ensure that children are enrolled and continue in school. In the Republic of Moldova, a UNICEF project specifically targets children and young people from institutions after they graduate from boarding schools. Activities include long-term training of trainers in life skills education, life skills education activities with students, a summer school for students on life skills, and the development of a Facilitator's Guide on life skills education.

Caregivers, families and community members also need the capacity and knowledge to play a role in the fight against trafficking. Teachers, social workers, and policemen have important roles to play. In Cambodia, a Child Protection Network is being established in Poipet, the border town that is the main gateway to Thailand. It will inform children and families about child rights and encourage communities to look for early warning signs of children at risk.

Children who have been trafficked need services to help them to leave their situation, to return home and

international instruments. Legal requirements and procedures that criminalize trafficked children or other categories of migrant children should be eliminated as far as possible, and children should be detained only